

GREEN HILLS NEWS

VOLUME 22

MARCH 11, 2010

NUMBER 10

Local writer earns runner-up prize in national contest for new authors

By Chris Brooks
Staff Writer

For the second time in three years, a local writer has been named a winner in the Cheerios New Author contest.

Jessica Young of Green Hills had her story, "Juliet the Jellyfish," selected as one of the top three stories from nearly 3,000 national entries. She received \$1,000 cash from Cheerios for having her story selected.

"It's been a really good year," Young said. "I entered this contest, and I also signed with an agent after looking for one for a while. Then Candlewick called in December and made an offer."

Candlewick's offer to Young was for another children's book, called "My Blue is H a p p y," which is currently under revision.

What was Young's inspiration for her contest entry? Her brother-in-law actually had something to do with it.

"He's a scuba-diver," Young said, "so he sees these crazy sea creatures, and it gave me these comical images of fish dancing. I chose a jellyfish because it's so different from

other fish."

Young summed up her work as all of the sea creatures having a big dance party. Except for Juliet, who is too shy to join in.

"No fins, no shell, and no backbone to slide, just the thought of dancing makes her mushy inside."

"By the end she finds her groove," Young said. "And that's basically the message I wanted to convey: that people can find their groove if they take a chance and follow their hearts."

Young is originally from Thunder Bay, Ontario. She earned a bachelor's degree in Fine Art and Psychology from
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Young

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the University of Guelph, and a master's degree in Expressive Therapies from Lesley University in Cambridge, Mass.

As an art teacher at Christ the King school, she says she hopes the story will encourage kids to be who they are.

"To me, I think of kids that have their own way of doing things," Young said, "and that I

hope this reminds them that they can find their own way to shine."

The Cheerios contest has been running for three years, and this is not the first time a local writer has been selected as a winner by the cereal giant. Another Nashville resident, Shellie Braeuner, a nanny, was the grand prize winner in the first Cheerios New Author Contest in 2007. Her book, titled "The Great Dog Wash" is illustrated by Robert Neubecker, and was featured in boxes of

Cheerios. It is now available through booksellers.

Ironically, both Braeuner and Young were in the same writing critique group, so there may be something in the water.

Cheerios has been working to provide books for parents and children to enjoy together.

"It's important for kids to grow up with books of their own," said Jeff Hingher, marketing manager for Cheerios cereal. "For the past eight years, Cheerios has given away more than 40 million children's books

free inside cereal boxes, and donated \$3.2 million to the non-profit First Book to provide new books to children from low-income families. It's another way that Cheerios can help get great books to parents and children to enjoy together.

Cheerios started the contest as a way to encourage up-and-coming unpublished children's book authors, and continue to nurture a love of reading. Entries in the Cheerios contest were judged on appropriate story/content for children ages

3 - 8, emotional connection, writing quality, uniqueness, and read-aloud potential. Final judging was performed by a panel of literary experts.

Entries for the next Cheerios New Author contest will be accepted from March 15 - July 15 at www.spoonfulsofstoriescontest.com.

Young's entry will be available online at www.spoonfulsofstories.com for people to read later this week.